HOSPITALITY ROBOTS: ANY CHANCE OF RESURRECTING THEM?

A few years ago, some robots were introduced as revolutionary in the hospitality industry. Most of the robots used in the industry were designed for "public relations," only to greet and inform lost or curious visitors. It is worth looking back at these hospitality robots that were once used in the tourism industry.

For instance, a robot named Spencer was designed to assist travelers in finding their way to the airport. The robot was trialed at Amsterdam Airport Schiphol in 2016. However, it has not been publicly heard of since then**. The robot was expensive, costing more than €4 million, with over €3 million being sponsored by the European Commission.**

On the Costa Diadema ship of Costa Cruises, you can interact with Pepper, a robot developed by SoftBank Robotics, to provide information and recommendations about restaurants, events, and excursions during the cruise. This same model is also present at the Hauterives tourist office. However, the office responsible for maintaining the robot can no longer access its back-end system. As a result, they can no longer repair or update the messages the robot broadcasts. This is because the software developer, APIDAE, has ceased its development.

At the hotel, Nao from Softbank Robotics helped guests by providing information about the surrounding tourist attractions and the amenities and services Hilton Hotels offers. However, the little robot has since disappeared from reception.

The Henn-Na hotel in Japan employed 243 hospitality robots for reception, in-room entertainment, room service, and luggage handling. However, in 2019, the hotel decided to "lay off" most of its machines. They realized that there were certain areas where the robots were not necessary. This was indeed a very enlightening observation.

Many bots introduced in the hospitality industry could not meet users' expectations due to their limited functionality and inability to understand the user. **These bots were mainly used for testing purposes and were unsuccessful in replacing human reception staff.** Moreover, their high purchase and maintenance costs discouraged tourism players from adopting them.

However, the situation might change with advancements in generative artificial intelligence. The machines can have more natural and complex conversations with users as they will be fed with information from a tourist office or hotel. Will this development lead to the resurrection of hospitality robots in the tourism industry?

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